

WRONG SIDE OF THE BUS

<http://www.wrongsideofthebus.com>

DOCUMENTARY PRODUCED
AND DIRECTED BY
ROD FREEDMAN,
CHANGE FOCUS MEDIA

NOTE: THIS STUDY
GUIDE RELATES TO
THE DVD AVAILABLE
FROM RONIN FILMS
INCLUDING THE
EXTRAS PROVIDED ON
THAT DVD.

A **STUDY GUIDE** BY MARGUERITE O'HARA



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‘He who passively accepts evil is as much involved in it as he who helps to perpetrate it. He who accepts evil without protesting against it is really cooperating with it.’

– Dr Martin Luther King

Introduction

‘I didn’t do it ... There was nothing I could do to stop it ... I wasn’t even born when that happened.’

Whether people are talking about bullying, racism or other bad things that have happened to people in the past, these are the statements we often read, hear and sometimes say ourselves. *Wrong Side of the Bus* (Rod Freedman, 2009) explores the degree of responsibility of ‘the bystander’ in the face of terrible events. If people fail to intervene against injustice and the oppression of others, are they in some way guilty of colluding with the perpetrator? While the place is South Africa and the political system Apartheid, this documentary has relevance way beyond the particular circumstances of the people and the politics of place that we encounter in this film. The issue of personal moral

blame for injustice that has been done to others in the past is very much alive in political debate. What does it mean to say ‘sorry’ or ‘I forgive you’ or ‘I forgive myself’ or ‘will you forgive me?’ What motivates some people to want to face the past and reconcile with others? What causes one person to act and another to remain on the sidelines?

Synopsis

What’s the price of being a bystander? Sidney Bloch is an internationally recognised professor of psychiatry, loving father, choral singer and author of many books on mental health and medical ethics. He is also a man with a troubled conscience. In this film, Sidney returns to South Africa for his medical school reunion, determined to face the guilt that has troubled him for forty years. He’s accompanied by his teenage son, Aaron, who turns out to

be his harshest critic.

In the Apartheid era, Sidney had benefited as a ‘White’, contributed negligibly to the struggle against racism and then left for Israel straight after his medical graduation in 1964. A sense of guilt accompanied him throughout his later life in Australia.

Sidney grew up in Apartheid South Africa, and abhorred the system but did almost nothing to oppose it. So how does a young man who lost fourteen relatives in the Holocaust become complicit with a racist system? In 1964, twelve of the 100 medical graduates in his class were classified ‘Non-White’ and were subject to many restrictions – they couldn’t examine

1: SIDNEY AND AARON BLOCH
2: BUS APARTHEID SIGN – NATIONAL LIBRARY OF SOUTH AFRICA



white patients, attend post-mortems on white bodies, or socialise equally. Sidney and his white colleagues barely registered this inequality.

Returning to Cape Town to share his past with Aaron, Sidney wants to confront his lack of courage during the Apartheid years. When he meets a 'Coloured' colleague, Irwin, to reflect on their disparate experiences, Sidney finds Irwin's frankness confronting.

He's determined to arrange some kind of reconciliation event at the reunion, despite warnings that he may be taking people to where they would rather not go. Former classmates question his motives. But Sidney won't be put off.

Flummoxed by the generosity of the black South Africans who say they have forgiven the Apartheid regime, Sidney is still unable to forgive the Afrikaners, whom he always regarded as the enemy, akin to Nazis. In an

unexpected encounter, he comes face to face with his own prejudice. During a workshop on 'Facing the Past', he feels for the first time a sense of belonging and is overwhelmed with emotion. Yet he still appears stuck in his role of a guilty bystander. Who is there to forgive him? He seems unable to accept that time has passed and other people have moved on.

In his quest to understand the past, Sidney seeks out victims of Apartheid, former colleagues who stayed to make a difference, and political activists such as Judge Albie Sachs, measuring his own stand against theirs. How do they regard him now? Could he have acted differently? What were his choices? Aaron critically observes his father's explorations, both supporting and provoking him to move on and, at least, forgive himself.

Curriculum Relevance

This documentary is an excellent resource for middle, senior and tertiary students studying:

- Politics and Society
- History
- Values Education
- Religion and Society (and related

PEOPLE IN THE FILM

SIDNEY BLOCH – Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Melbourne and Honorary Consultant Psychiatrist at St Vincent's Hospital who graduated from the University of Cape Town Medical School in 1964. Sidney grew up in South Africa but left when he graduated as a doctor. He is returning to attend a reunion of his medical school class.

AARON BLOCH – Sidney's son who had just completed secondary school when he went with his father to South Africa.

JUDGE ALBIE SACHS – political activist during the Apartheid era and, like Sidney, Jewish.

BEAUTY NGOZO – a black South African nursing aide who cared for Sidney's mother in her last year of life.

THEMBA LONZI – 'Facing the Past' workshop leader at the Cape Town Holocaust Centre and composer.

RONNIE SCHNEEWEISS – fellow medical student and friend of Sidney Bloch, now a retired Professor of Family Medicine in Seattle.

IRWIN COMBRINCK – one of the twelve non-white medical students in Sidney's year.

ED COETZEE – Afrikaner member of Sidney's medical class.

MODISE PHEKONYANE – guide and one-time prisoner at Robben Island Prison where many anti-Apartheid activists, including Nelson Mandela, were imprisoned for many years.

subjects)

- English
- Civics and Citizenship

The strength of this film lies in the way it makes the personal political and the political personal, and in the questions it poses that are relevant to all of us, regardless of where we grew up or our ethnic background.

It would be helpful for students to have some awareness of the history of South Africa, and particularly the

1: MODISE PHEKONYANE, FORMER PRISONER, ROBBER ISLAND
 2: FILMING IN MANDELA'S FORMER CELL
 3: BEAUTY NGOZA AND SIDNEY BLOCH
 4: ALBIE SACHS WITH SIDNEY BLOCH

THE FILMMAKERS

ROD FREEDMAN (Change Focus Media) – wrote, directed and produced *Wrong Side of the Bus*. Like Sidney Bloch, he is Jewish and grew up in South Africa, leaving when he was fourteen. Freedman has made several documentaries including *Uncle Chatzkel* (1999) which received several international awards and two Australian Film Institute nominations. Freedman's reflections about *Wrong Side of the Bus* are included later in this guide.

MARC RADOMSKY – cinematographer

SOUND RECORDISTS – Rod Freedman, Craig Larkin and Gary Rundle

FILM EDITOR – Joanne Levitan

SCRIPT EDITOR, CO-

PRODUCER – Lesley Seebold

ORIGINAL MUSIC – Todd Hunter. Themba Lonzi, who also appears in the film, wrote the song 'When God Made Africa'.

Apartheid system, before watching the documentary. They may also be able to see similarities in the Australian experience with the Indigenous people of this country. After all, it was only in 2008 that the Australian Government apologised to the original inhabitants of this country for the years of dispossession, dislocation and oppression that they have suffered since white settlement.

Background

South African History

In 1994, South Africa, where a white minority had ruthlessly repressed a black majority for over 300 years, achieved an extraordinary transformation, forging peace and democracy from a state of sectarian civil war. This transformation was achieved with a minimum of violence. The elections that led to Nelson Mandela assuming presidency of the country were marked by limited conflict, and worldwide rejoicing, but the traumas and divisions of the past were not so easily left behind.

Today South Africa is a powerful,

wealthy nation but it is still driven by gross inequalities and the grinding poverty of millions. As well, the country has one of the highest rates of AIDS in the world.

The transition to representative democracy in South Africa is even more remarkable when the country's history, particularly since 1948, is examined. Below are some key events in the period between 1948 and 1994 as the Apartheid system reinforced white supremacy and privilege through draconian legislation. Throughout this period, the country and its government faced increasing opposition to their racist policies from both within and outside South Africa. In 1994, free elections were held and a representative government led by Nelson Mandela was elected.

The following account of how Apartheid became entrenched as a social system is very condensed. Only major aspects of policy and key events are included; its effects on people is referred to in the documentary.

Key Events

South Africa was colonised by the Dutch in the seventeenth century. Later, British domination of the Dutch descendants (known as Boers or Afrikaners) resulted in the establishment by the Afrikaners of the republics of the Orange Free State and Transvaal. Tensions between Afrikaners in the north and the British in the south sparked the Boer War, 1899–1902. Following South Africa's independence from Britain in 1910, an uneasy power-sharing arrangement between the British and the Afrikaners held sway until 1948, when the Afrikaner

National Party gained a strong majority.

While the whites had always dominated the non-whites since the start of the colony, strategists in the National Party devised the policy of Apartheid as a means to cement their control over the country. With the enactment of Apartheid laws from 1948, racial discrimination was institutionalised.

Racial laws touched every aspect of life, including a prohibition of marriage and sexual relations between non-whites and whites, and the sanctioning of 'whites-only' jobs. In 1950, the Population Registration Act required that all South Africans be racially classified into one of three categories: white, black or coloured. The coloured category also included Asians. A person could not be considered white if a parent was non-white. The determination that a person was 'obviously white' would take into account 'his habits, education, and speech and deportment and demeanour'. A black person would be of, or accepted as, a member of an African tribe or race, and a coloured person was neither black nor white. A government department was responsible for this complex classification. Non-compliance with the race laws was dealt with harshly. All blacks were required to carry 'pass books' containing fingerprints, photo and personal information if entering white areas.

A series of acts were passed from the 1950s onwards to deal harshly with any form of dissent; the government was empowered to declare a state of emergency as a means to quell protest and political activism. Penalties included fines, imprisonment and

GLOSSARY

AFRIKAANS – A language that developed from seventeenth-century Dutch and was one of the two official languages of South Africa in the Apartheid era. There are now eleven official languages, with English the most commonly used.

ANC – African National Congress

ANGST – a feeling of anxiety and uneasiness, sometimes accompanied by guilt

APARTHEID – a political system based on racial segregation and the separate development of races in one country

COLLUSION – secret agreement

COMPLICIT – associated with or participating in a questionable act or a crime

RECONCILIATION – restoration of friendly relations



whippings. The penalties imposed on any form of political protest, even non-violent protest, were severe. In 1960, blacks demonstrated in the township of Sharpeville against the pass laws; 69 people were killed and 187 people wounded by the police.

During the state of emergency, which occurred intermittently until 1989, anyone could be imprisoned without trial for months at a time. Many prisoners were tortured in custody and many died. Those who were tried were often sentenced to death, banished, or imprisoned for life, like Nelson Mandela.¹

Despite the entrenchment of Apartheid policy and the repression of non-whites, political activism and resistance continued. Black South Africans and a small number of white South Africans maintained their opposition to the gross injustices until the government was forced by pressures from both within and outside the country to accept that the system was not viable. This political pressure led to free elections in 1994 and the appointment of Nelson

Mandela as the first black President.

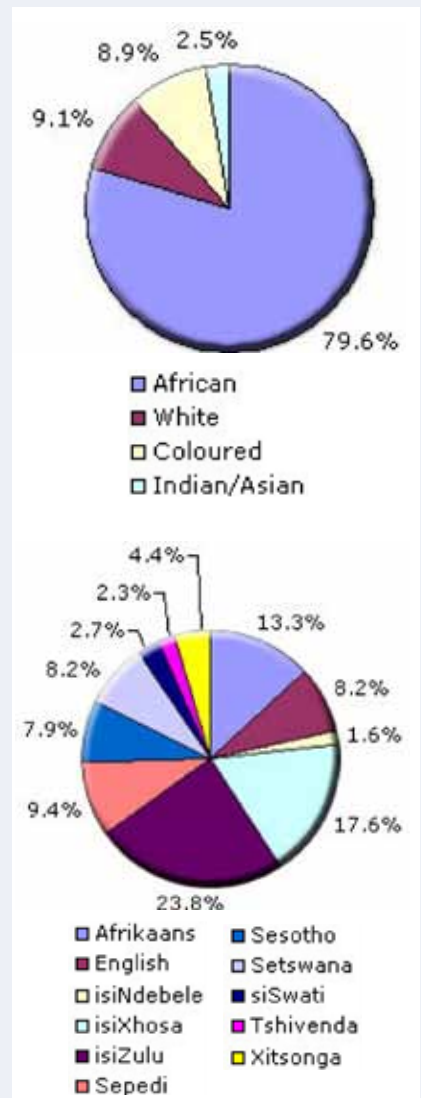
People – South Africa’s Population today

See Pie Chart 1. South Africa is a nation of peoples of diverse origins, cultures, languages and beliefs. According to the 2007 estimates from Statistics South Africa, the population stands at 48 million. Africans are in the majority at 38 million, making up 80 per cent of the population. The white population is estimated at 4.3 million (9 per cent), the coloured population at 4.2 million (9 per cent) and the Indian/Asian population at 1.2 million (2.5 per cent).

South Africa’s population by language

See Pie Chart 2. While more than three quarters of South Africa’s population is black, they are neither culturally nor linguistically homogeneous. Nine of the eleven official languages are African, reflecting a variety of ethnic groups which nonetheless have a great deal in common in terms of background, culture and descent.

Africans include the Nguni people, comprising the Zulu, Xhosa, Ndebele



1: SHARPEVILLE CROWD FLEE FROM POLICE – MAYIBUYE ARCHIVES



and Swazi; the Sotho-Tswana people, comprising the Southern, Northern and Western Sotho (Tswana); the Tsonga; and the Venda.

South Africa's white population descends largely from the colonial immigrants of the mid-seventeenth to nineteenth centuries – Dutch, German, French Huguenot and British. Linguistically they are divided into Afrikaans and English-speaking groups, although many small communities that have immigrated over the last century retain the use of other languages. European Jews came mainly from Lithuania before and after World War Two.

The label 'coloured' is a contentious one, but is still used for people of mixed race who are descended from slaves brought in from east and central Africa, the Indigenous Khoisan who lived in the Cape at the time, Indigenous Africans and whites. The majority speak Afrikaans.

The majority of South Africa's Asian population is Indian in origin, many of them descended from indentured workers brought to work on the sugar plantations of the eastern coastal area in the nineteenth century. They are

largely English-speaking, although many also retain the languages of their origins. There is also a group of Chinese South Africans.

Since the early 1990s, many white South Africans have emigrated and re-settled in countries such as Australia, New Zealand, the UK, Canada and the United States. Accurate South African Government figures for exactly how many white South Africans have emigrated are hard to ascertain, but one report put the figure at 800,000 since 1995.

Student Activity – Pre-viewing questions

- Should people who were not directly involved in the racial oppression of others feel guilty for what was done in the past?
- Do you think being a bystander to injustice can ever be justified?
- What does 'collude' with oppression mean?
- Does collusion always have to be a deliberate choice?
- Who benefits from being forgiven – the perpetrators, the victims or the bystanders?
- What does the much-used term 'closure' mean to you and does

it have relevance in how we deal with unjust past events?

- In what sense is the past always with us?
- How can we make practical reparations for wrongs done to others?
- What is your understanding of 'forgiveness'? Do you associate the concept with any particular religion?
- What kind of wrongs done to you or your family would you find it impossible to forgive?
- Is it easier to forgive yourself or to forgive others?
- Is there a situation for which you believe forgiveness is not appropriate?
- Should those suspected of committing war crimes that happened many years ago be pursued, charged and tried, e.g., Nazi war criminals, responsible for the slaughter of Jewish people, who may have been hiding under a different identity in another country; or the Indonesian military who are believed to have ordered the murder of Australian journalists in Balibo, East Timor, in 1975?

1: SIDNEY BLOCH WITH BEAUTY NGOZA



Background to the making of the film

Sidney Bloch, a Melbourne psychiatrist, approached Sydney filmmaker Rod Freedman (also from South Africa), with the idea of recording his proposed journey to South Africa with his son, Aaron. The opportunity to film arose when he arranged to attend a reunion of his medical school class at the University of Cape Town. When Freedman asked Bloch why he wanted this journey filmed, Bloch offered two reasons:

- He wanted to show his son Aaron what it was like to grow up in a racist society. He believed that a film of the experience might be a good way to show other young people the effects of racism and the choices one has in confronting it.
- He hoped to achieve a kind of reconciliation with his former colleagues and examine his own conscience about having been what he calls ‘a bystander’ during the Apartheid regime.

While the director initially had doubts about whether there was a film in this journey that would have relevance

for others, he accompanied Sidney and Aaron on their three-week trip to South Africa with a cameraman (also of South African origin). A sound recordist joined them there.

Student Activities

After watching the documentary

1. Father and Son – Sidney Bloch and Aaron

‘There’s anger, there’s guilt, there’s shame.’

– Sidney Bloch

What happens in this film takes place over about a month. The trip to South Africa is for three weeks. The first part of the film introduces the two central figures and through their excursions around Cape Town outlines aspects of the Apartheid system under which Sidney grew up.

- What do you learn about Sidney’s professional and home life in the early scenes of the film?
- Why do you think Sidney takes his son Aaron on this trip?
- How much could Aaron really know and understand about his

father’s life in South Africa before they set off?

- Sidney says that ‘standing by fairly idly must amount to collusion, and to me I guess collusion is complicity’. Is this an accurate explanation of the role of a ‘bystander’? What meaning do words like ‘collusion’, ‘complicity’ and ‘bystander’ have for you?
- What examples can you give from your own life of having been a bystander?
- Does Aaron believe that, as a Jew, he ought to be more aware of racism?
- What does Sidney hope will be achieved through a reconciliation ceremony with his former classmates at the medical school?
- List some of the more obnoxious aspects of Apartheid law that Sidney shows Aaron.
- Did segregation based on race disadvantage or restrict white people in any way?

1: AARON BLOCH WITH MODISE PHEKONYANE, ROBBERN ISLAND 2: TABLE MOUNTAIN, CAPE TOWN FROM ROBBERN ISLAND 3: SIDNEY, MODISE AND AARON 4: SIDNEY AND AARON BLOCH 5: SIDNEY AND AARON BLOCH 6: SIDNEY AND AARON BLOCH



- At the Holocaust Museum in Cape Town there are photos of black people on the move. What similarities in these photos of families packing up their things to be moved on does Aaron see with the experience of his Lithuanian ancestors?
- Why does Sidney feel unforgiving towards Hendrik Verwoerd, South Africa's Afrikaner Prime Minister between 1958 and 1966?
- How do the black South Africans approached by Sidney respond to his questions about how they feel about whites today?
- The 'wrong side of the bus' incident that gives the film its title seems to encapsulate Sidney's feelings about being a bystander. Describe what happened on that day. How do you think you might have acted?
- What is the view of Albie Sachs (a famous anti-apartheid Jewish activist) of what happened on that day on the bus? What does he say about the crucial strategy in political action?
- Why did Albie Sachs and others feel optimistic about the eventual outcome of their action and protests?
- Aaron tells his father that he would

have left South Africa as soon as possible as he values his own life more than any political cause and that his own life is his primary responsibility. Sidney's response is that we have a responsibility to be a member of the human community. Is responsibility to yourself while at the same time retaining your humanity possible when you live in an unjust society? How do you make choices about when, and when not, to become a participant in changing unfair aspects of the society of which you are a part?

The next part of the film focuses on one of the main purposes of Sidney's trip to South Africa – the reunion of his medical school class and his proposed reconciliation event.

'It's a dismal past but it's history.'
– Irwin, Sidney's non-white colleague

'It's ongoing history, still alive for me. I have to reconcile.'
– Sidney

- What is the role of the Transformation Office at the University of Cape Town? What advice do they give Sidney about his proposal for a 'reconciliation' meeting?
- Why do you think some of Sidney's

colleagues are reluctant to be part of this meeting?

- What is the purpose of Sidney's visit to Beauty Ngozo?
- How would you describe Beauty and her son-in-law's responses to Sidney's questions about the past?
- What lessons from their responses does Aaron suggest his father could learn?
- When Sidney attends a workshop at the Holocaust Centre – 'Facing the Past' – what is he hoping to gain and why do you think it had such an effect on him?
- Describe workshop leader and musician Themba's view of 'Facing The Past'?
- What is the pivotal aspect of being part of the workshop for Sidney?
- When Sidney meets Ronnie and Irwin in the District Six Museum, how do each of them recall the past and what effect does it have on each of them?
- Ed Coetzee, one of the few

1: RONNIE SCHNEEWEISS, IRWIN COMBRINCK, SIDNEY BLOCH 2: RONNIE SCHNEEWEISS, IRWIN COMBRINCK, SIDNEY BLOCH 3: BEAUTY NGOZA AND SIDNEY BLOCH 4: SIDNEY BLOCH AND APARTHEID ERA PARK BENCH 5: APARTHEID ERA SIGN 6: APARTHEID ERA SIGN



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6

Afrikaner students in the medical class, maintains that he too felt isolated by others: he was treated with hostility because he was an Afrikaner. Is Sidney able to acknowledge that prejudice is more than just about race?

- Sidney and Aaron visit Robben Island, the notorious prison where many political prisoners, including Nelson Mandela, were held and mistreated for many years. What do they learn from their guide, Modise Phekonyane, who was imprisoned there for six years?
- Why do you think Modise is able to help Sidney to move on, when until now he has been stuck in his position of guilt?
- Why do you think Aaron has changed his feelings at the end of the journey?
- What do you think of the relationship between Sidney and Aaron?

2. The structure of this documentary and the director's views

The way a documentary is structured influences how we will respond to it. Similar to a short story, a documentary maker must focus on a single story

and a limited number of characters; fifty-six minutes is not a lot of time in which to tell a complex story. This film can be divided into two main sections, with a narrative arc that peaks with the account of the story about the segregated bus and culminates in the final scenes at Robben Island.

Here is the director Rod Freedman's statement about his reasons for making this film.

The central theme is the dilemma of being a bystander and the price of not taking action. Sid's journey with his son, Aaron, is about reviewing his past moral choices, re-evaluating his actions and investigating how other people responded to the situation. I was intrigued by Sid's capacity to openly express his dilemmas to Aaron, who naturally questions the choices his father has made.

The themes of being a bystander, facing the past and forgiveness are relevant to Australian and international audiences. To a greater or lesser extent, we are all bystanders. We may oppose the government's treatment of refugees, or we may feel something should be done about indigenous

health, but when it comes down to it, what do we do? Is helplessness a sufficient excuse?

My early memories are similar to Sid's, though he is ten years older. Although I was only fourteen when I left, I recall clearly the effects of Apartheid on all of us – the everyday injustice in our society, the inequality of opportunity between whites and blacks and our revulsion of the police state which arose to keep the white minority in power. All this was complicated by feeling helpless to change the system and afraid to speak out.

Like Sid, my family is of Lithuanian-Jewish background. Our forebears had migrated from the oppression and poverty of Eastern Europe to a land of opportunity in South Africa. Paradoxically, we became oppressors, simply because we were white. We were not only part of a minority of Whites within a Black majority, but also a Jewish

1: SIDNEY BLOCH ADDRESSES REUNION COLLEAGUES 2: REGGRADUATION CEREMONY 3: REGGRADUATION CEREMONY 4: SIDNEY ADDRESSES FORMER STUDENTS 5: IRWIN COMBRINCK, RECONCILIATION MEETING 6: RECONCILIATION MEETING



minority within the White English-speaking minority.

We never felt comfortable in this role and regarded ourselves as not being part of 'the system'. People in our neighbourhood were placed under house arrest. We knew people who were under indefinite detention. My father helped my uncle escape over the Botswana border because he was about to be arrested as a 'communist'. Unable to imagine peaceful change or a future for their children, my parents opted to leave Johannesburg around the same time as Sid emigrated from Cape Town and for the same reason – we abhorred Apartheid. But to what extent did we, and fellow Jewish White South Africans, also collude with the system? Certainly we were beneficiaries, even if we all professed to disagree with it.

Sid could be criticised for being a 'bleeding heart' and self-indulgent. He might be seen as self-righteous. But his openness attracted me and is a strength of the film. I thought he was courageous in asking challenging questions of himself, facing his past and attempting to reconcile with his colleagues and his conscience. By

enabling his son, Aaron to witness his journey, he was also prepared to be vulnerable.

I hope audiences will find this a challenging, relevant and ultimately, inspirational film. At least, it should challenge audiences to consider their own roles as bystanders in everyday life and to consider the alternatives.

- Aaron narrates this film. Why do you think the director chose his voice to tell the story? Would the film have been different if there had been an anonymous narrator?
- Did you sense that the director or Sidney and Aaron knew where this journey would take them? What are some of the surprising encounters?
- How are key aspects of the Apartheid system presented visually? Give examples of images that recreate the past.
- Do you think the film has relevance beyond the South African experience? How might it relate to our own experience, not only with regard to political events but also to our personal sense of responsibility to others?

3. Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRCs)

When representative democracy is established following a period of the violation of human rights, some countries have set up hearings where both victims and perpetrators of past injustices can come together and tell their stories. These organisations are known by various names; in South Africa it was known as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

After the unbanning of the African National Congress (ANC) and other political parties, Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners were released in 1990. All political parties met to form the first democratic government of national unity and to determine how best to guide South Africa in the future. It was important that the evils of the Apartheid system were publicly

1: DIRECTOR ROD FREEDMAN 2: APARTHEID ERA SIGN 3: FILM CREW (L-R) CRAIG TARLING, ROD FREEDMAN, MARC RADOMSKY 4: ROD FREEDMAN AND MARC RADOMSKY 5: WHITES ONLY SIGN, APARTHEID ERA 6: MARC RADOMSKY AND ROD FREEDMAN FILMING SIDNEY BLOCH AND ALBIE SACHS



acknowledged as having created an unnatural society divided on racial lines and based on hatred, mistrust, intolerance and inequality.

After looking at how other countries had dealt with human rights abuses, South Africa's leaders decided not to go down the path of Nuremberg and prosecute those accused of war crimes during World War Two. The new multi-racial Government believed that national unity was best served through reconciliation instead of revenge. The Commission used terms such as 'reparation' instead of 'retaliation' and 'reconciliation, reconstruction'. Perhaps most significantly, it declared that 'amnesty shall be granted in respect of acts, omissions and offences associated with political objectives and committed in the course of the conflicts of the past'.

In 1996, seventeen TRC commissioners were appointed. For two years they conducted hearings and investigations all over the country. Their aims included:

- To return dignity to victims of Apartheid crimes
- To recommend reparation measures for these victims

- To grant amnesty to perpetrators who told the whole truth about human rights violations
- To restore moral order in society
- To seek the truth, record it and make it known to the public
- To create a culture of human rights and respect for the rule of law
- To write a report on its findings and activities and recommend measures to prevent such human rights violations from ever happening again.

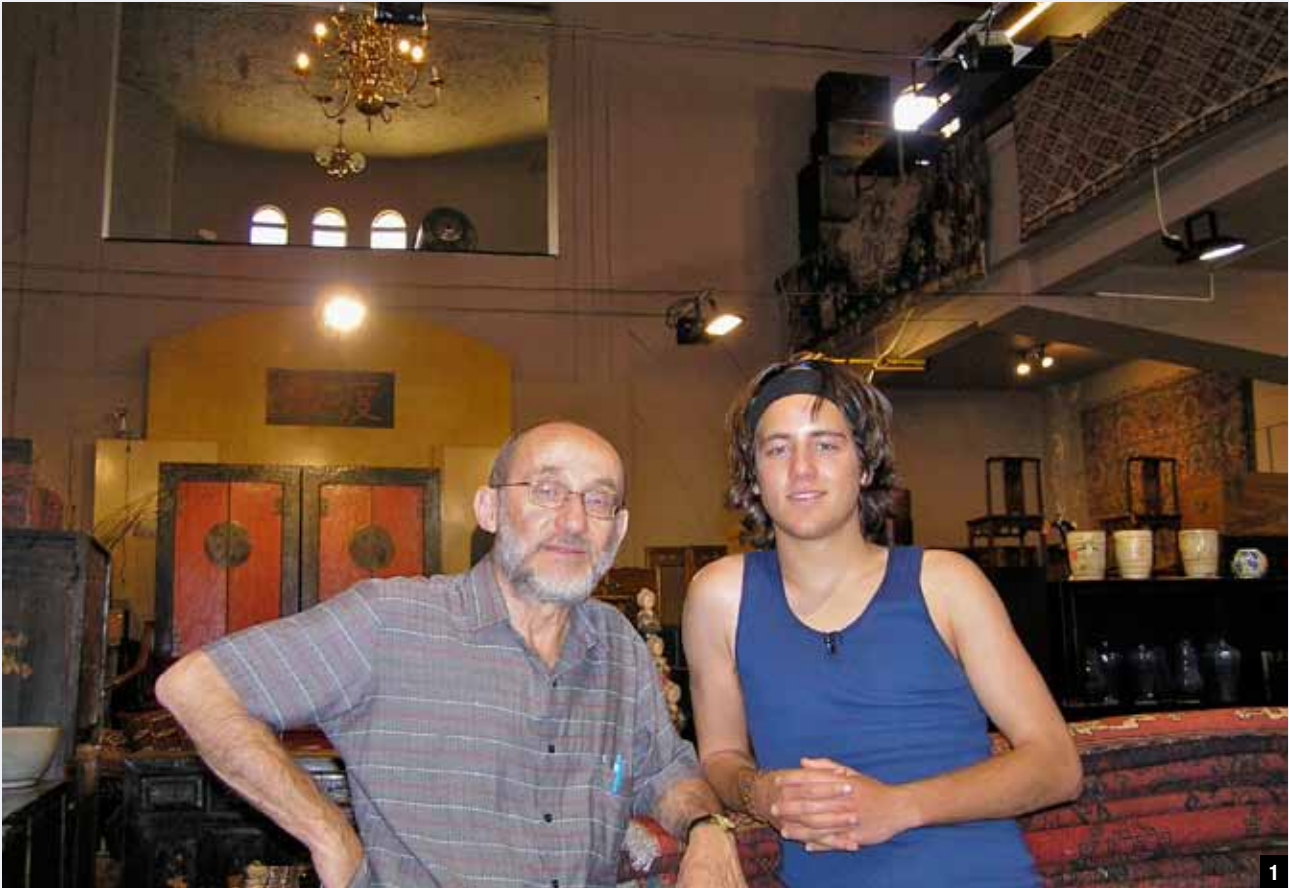
The TRC received over 20,000 statements from victims, 2,000 of whom testified in public hearings. The TRC also received nearly 8,000 applications for amnesty from perpetrators of Apartheid crimes.

- Do you think such public hearings are a good way for people to acknowledge the evils of the past and to move on?
- Why is it important for people to have their stories heard?
- If, like Nelson Mandela and others, you had been imprisoned for many years, how far do you think you could forgive those who imprisoned and mistreated you and move on?
- Would people who committed

atrocities be likely to come forward and publicly admit what they had done?

- Who do you think would benefit most from such hearings?
- How is the workshop Sidney Bloch attends at the Holocaust Centre in Cape Town similar to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Hearings?
- In what ways is being a bystander to terrible events different from being an active participant?
- Are you aware of any other countries that have held hearings similar to the TRC?
- In 1975, five unarmed Australian journalists were killed by members of the Indonesian forces invading East Timor. Should this 'war crime' be overlooked in what is sometimes described as 'the national interest'? Whose interests do you believe would be served by an investigation?
- Do you think it is important for the

1: ISAAC: 'WE FORGIVE BUT NEVER FORGET' 2: DISTRICT 6 MUSEUM 3: 'EVERYONE HAS A LITTLE RACISM IN THEM.' 4: CHILDREN, LANGA TOWNSHIP 5: CHILDREN, LANGA TOWNSHIP 6: FILMING, LANGA TOWNSHIP



truth about what happened in the past to be accurately documented?

- Why are some governments reluctant to acknowledge mistakes and mistreatment of their citizens?

4. Being Jewish in South Africa

While the majority of South African Jews expressed opposition to the Apartheid system and only a minority voted for the Nationalist government, Jews shared the status of the privileged in a society based on legalised discrimination because they were part of the white minority. Like other white people, the Jewish community prospered on the back of Apartheid where black labour was cheap.

Their role under Apartheid raises uncomfortable questions. Given their long history of discrimination and persecution, it may have been expected that Jewish people would have opposed the Apartheid regime more actively. In fact they did comprise a sizable proportion of the whites who resisted, including people like Albie Sachs, who we see in this film. Other notable Jewish activists were MP Helen Suzman, Joe Slovo and his wife

Ruth First. These people and others devoted their lives to the struggle. By contrast, most members of the Jewish community kept their heads down. Sidney Bloch was often advised by his parents to avoid politics since it was far too dangerous: a typical reaction.

- Did this amount to tacit acceptance?
- Is apathy immoral?
- Do those of us who did not grow up in South Africa have any right to judge those who did and who chose not to be involved in the political struggle?
- Should we expect those who have survived oppression to become defenders of others who are persecuted?⁴

5. Freedoms – being politically active and acting strategically

While *Wrong Side of the Bus* is about what happened in South Africa, there are many aspects of the film that have universal relevance. In Australia, people live in a democracy and can freely express their opinions through the ballot box and in many other lawful ways. We are encouraged to become active citizens.

National issues you may feel strongly about are:

- The extended detention of boat people/refugees in remote detention centres
- The allocation of irrigation water from a river system to tobacco farmers
- Withdrawal of public funding to all 'private', i.e. non-government schools.

Other state issues that may provoke you into action are:

- Increasing the driving licence age to twenty-one
- The segregation of all state schools into either boys' or girls' schools
- The introduction of an 11pm until 6am curfew for everyone under eighteen.

It could be a local matter such as:

- Permitting the takeover of public parkland and re-zoning it residential in order to build high-rise buildings

1: SIDNEY AND AARON BLOCH IN FORMER VREDEHOEK SYNAGOGUE

- The banning of all dogs off-lead in a suburb, including parks
- Allowing a planning permit in a residential area to convert a dis-used school into a prison.

Choose one of these issues and decide which of the actions listed in the table on the right would be most effective in promoting change. After you have considered your options, write the issue you have chosen at the top of the table.

In the first column, 'Action', is a list of possible actions we can take to express our views. In the second column headed 'How effective?' list how useful this strategy might be in bringing about change. In the third column, headed 'Under Apartheid', indicate whether such an action was possible for people protesting against Apartheid policies in South Africa between 1948 and 1994. What may have happened to people taking such action?

6. Bringing it all together

'We can't all be heroes and there's nothing wrong with that.' – Aaron

'Victim, perpetrator, bystander?' – Sidney Bloch

- What does heroic behaviour mean to you?
- How does the meaning of Sidney's journey become clear at Robben Island?
- Why is he finally able to forgive himself for having been a bystander?
- What does the film tell us about fathers and their children and the need for each to empathise with the other?
- 'You can't keep thinking about the past or hang onto regrets and guilt, but it's important to face the past so you can work out how you'll act in the future.'

– Director, Rod Freedman

Conduct a class discussion about the importance of confronting the past as a prerequisite to moving forward.

There are interesting extras on the DVD which explore further issues. They include:

- An interview with Rod Freedman,

ISSUE:

| Action | How effective? | Under Apartheid |
|--|----------------|-----------------|
| Voting in a local, state or federal election | | |
| Writing letters to newspapers | | |
| Contacting a television current affairs program | | |
| Circulating a petition to present to your State or Federal MP | | |
| Organising a protest march through the streets | | |
| Standing for Parliament | | |
| Joining a political party | | |
| Taking strike action | | |
| Boycotting and encouraging others to boycott a product | | |
| Putting up posters in public places | | |
| Leafleting and letterboxing | | |
| Deliberately disobeying the local laws of, say, trespass or access | | |
| Spray-painting messages on buildings | | |
| Holding a public meeting | | |
| Organising a media event on a colourful and noisy scale | | |
| Becoming a member of a trade union or other group | | |
| Passive resistance | | |
| Withholding taxes or rates | | |



- the director
- Aaron in conversation with African school students
- Aaron comments on Sidney's journey
- Aaron's final reflections
- Extra parts of Albie Sachs' conversation with Sidney and Aaron
- Modise about life on Robben Island
- Modise on forgiveness
- Helen Lieberman (not included in the main film) on social activism

Resources

The books and films listed below offer personal accounts of life in South Africa from different perspectives.

Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, Black Bay Books, 1994.

J.M. Coetzee, *Disgrace*, Viking, 1999. (Coetzee now lives in South Australia and has written several novels and autobiographical books about his life in South Africa)

Andre Brink, *A Fork in the Road*, Harvill Secker, 2009. (Autobiography about growing up white in South Africa)

Long Night's Journey into Day: South Africa's Search for Truth and Reconciliation (Deborah Hoffmann and Frances Reid, 2000) – an award-winning and Oscar-nominated documentary available on DVD from Ronin Films.

Disgrace (Steve Jacobs, 2008) – a filmed version of Coetzee's novel about South Africa. (ATOM study guide available)

Country of My Skull: Guilt, Sorrow, and the Limits of Forgiveness in the New South Africa, by Antjie Krog, 1999 – a journalist's reflections on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

A selected list of other feature films and documentaries about South Africa can be found at <<http://www.globalexchange.org/countries/africa/southafrica/films.html>>.

Links to sites regarding Apartheid and racism studies:

- <http://www.overcomingapartheid.msu.edu>
- <http://www.apartheidmuseum.org>
- <http://www.ctholocaust.co.za>
- <http://www.racismnoway.com.au>
- <http://www.facinghistory.org>

Endnotes

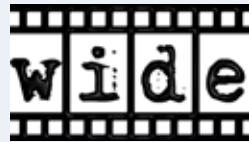
- ¹ <http://www-cs-students.stanford.edu/~cale/cs201/apartheid.hist.html>
- ² <http://www.southafrica.info/about/people/population.htm>
- ³ <http://www.newsweek.com/id/184783>
- ⁴ From Stacey Kalish, 'Dynasties of Denial', *The Australian Jewish News*, 6 August 2004.

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Wrong Side of the Bus (with extras) is available from Ronin Films, P.O. Box 1005, Civic Square, ACT 2608. Phone: 02 6248 0851, email <orders@roninfilms.com.au>, or visit the Ronin website at <<http://www.roninfilms.com.au>>.



International Distributor: WIDE Management <<http://www.widemanagement.com>>



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